

Giving to Please God

Philippians 4:14-23

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When I was growing up, my mom insisted that my sisters and I had to write thank you notes whenever we would receive a gift. To reinforce this, she would tell us we couldn't use the gift we were given until the note was written, the envelope addressed, a stamp was put on it, and it was in the mail. I remember teaching our daughters to do the same, emphasizing the note didn't need to be long and simply needed to express their thankfulness.

Now, when I receive a gift from one of our daughters, I often go overboard in my expression of thankfulness. Here's an example of a recent note I sent to our daughter Emily and her husband Matt: *"I am thankfully thankful with a thankful attitude of gratitude for the shirt you gave me. It's very comfortable, for which I am thankful. Thanks can't fully express how thankful I am. Thankfully, Pa. P.S. Thanks again."*

It could be argued that the whole Book of Philippians is a thank you letter. We see this attitude at the very beginning in 1:3: ***"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."*** Paul's over-the-top gratitude is especially evident in the closing passage, which is our text for today.

Listen to Philippians 4:14-23: ***"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. ²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."***

Here's a summary of the sermon: *Because we're partakers of grace and partners in the gospel, we're to participate in giving to God's work by practicing joyful generosity.*

While some pastors get nervous when preaching about money matters, I don't because the Bible has a lot to say about it. I've not chosen this topic because of a budget shortfall (our offerings are up) or because I know what people give (I don't). This is simply the next text in Philippians as we've been going verse-by-verse through this wonderful book. If you're our guest today, please know I'm not here to coax you out of your cash or guilt you into giving. I do want us to see how generosity leads to joy and how our giving enables others to go with the gospel.

Are you aware almost half the parables Jesus told are about money or possessions? There are 40 verses on baptism in the Bible, 275 verses on prayer, 350 verses on faith, 650 verses on love, and over 2,000 verses which deal with finances or material possessions.

In a church in the south, where it was common for the congregation to verbally respond during the sermon, the pastor attempted to get the congregation excited about the future. He began by saying, *"This church needs to get up and walk under the power of Jesus."* The congregation replied, *"Let it walk preacher, let it walk."* The pastor continued, *"This church, like Elijah has to get up and run."* The congregation replied, *"Let it run preacher, let it run."* Then the preacher said, *"This church has to mount up on wings like eagles and fly."* The congregation replied with enthusiasm, *"Let it fly preacher, let it fly."* The pastor amped up his voice and added, *"Now if this church is going to fly it's going to take some MONEY."* There was a long pause before the congregation replied with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, *"Let it walk preacher, let it walk."*

We'll see in our passage how Paul expressed his thankfulness to the Philippians for how they were flying to give their finances to enable Paul to go with the gospel. Let's consider six principles which will guide us in our giving.

1. The partnership of giving. Look at verse 14: ***"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble."*** The word ***"yet"*** means, *"over and above,"* while ***"share"*** refers to *"fellowship or participation."* As we learned in 1:5, Paul considered them ***"partners in the gospel"*** and in 1:7, he referred to them as ***"partakers of grace."*** Here in verse 14, he thanked them for sharing in his ***"trouble,"*** which means, *"tribulation and hardships."*

The Philippian church was bonded with Paul through happy and hard times. They didn't just send a care package; they sent themselves because they cared. Like the "care teams" the Edge Missions Team is forming, they provided prayer and

provisions for Paul. They were saying, “*We’re in this together. Your troubles are ours, too.*” As someone has said, “*You may give without loving, but you can’t love without giving.*”

2. The pleasure of giving. From the very beginning, this young, vibrant local church had a missionary vision for their neighbors and the nations. Right after Lydia, the first convert, came to faith, Acts 16:15 tells us Paul and his companions accepted her hospitality by spending time in her home. In fact, this is where the church met. In Acts 16:34, the converted jailer made a meal for Paul and Silas. Just months into their new faith, this new church partnered financially with the Apostle Paul. Faithful giving should be one of the first things we establish in our walk with Jesus.

When I was saved at the age of 19, I immediately started giving a tithe (10%) of the little income that I had. I became a giver because the guys who were discipling me were doing so with great joy. On Thursday night, I had the privilege of speaking to the Intervarsity students at Augie. Intervarsity is one of our local Go Team partners. A number of these students attend Edgewood. One of the challenges I gave them is to begin giving weekly to God when they’re young, even if it’s only a little.

According to a study called *Passing the Plate*, most Christians who tithe began this practice when they were in their 20’s. Two thirds of all tithers started this discipline before the age of thirty. I love how our EdgeKids ministry supports two children in Africa and how they get excited each year to participate in the Baby Bottle Project with Pregnancy Resources (this will kick off on Mother’s Day weekend). Here’s the principle: *Give back what God has given to you because you can’t outgive God with your time, talents and treasures.*

Joyful generosity is contagious, isn’t it? We see this in verses 15-16: “***And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.***”

Because they had been transformed by the grace of the gospel, they couldn’t help but give, so Paul could go with the gospel to other communities. They were the only church that partnered with Paul in this way. They practiced grace giving because they had been given grace. Thessalonica was the next stop on Paul’s missionary journey, located just sixty miles from Philippi. Notice they did this

right at the “*beginning*” and they did it repeatedly and consistently “*once and again.*”

It’s interesting that Paul didn’t ask them for support; the church knew about his need and responded before he could ask. In a similar way, the EdgeMissions Team heard of a need this week from Mary Hartman and made a recommendation to our Deacon Board that we financially partner with Blake Hillhouse for his mission trip to Guatemala May 3-10. The Deacon Board joyfully approved this. Blake is the son of Mike and Pam Hillhouse, who served in Burkina Faso for many years as members of our global Go Team. Mike was also a missionary intern here for two years.

Incidentally, while I was typing this, I received a text from a pastor friend along with a letter from 1940 which mentioned how Edgewood helped to revitalize a dying Baptist church in Geneseo by sending them a pastor and providing other resources so they could stay open, which they are to this day. This made me smile because it’s part of our DNA to partner with other churches, as we did with Easter Extravaganza.

There is great pleasure in giving, isn’t there? I think of 2 Corinthians 9:7: “*Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*” The word “*cheerful*” is the Greek word for “*hilarious.*” Giving should cause us to break out into joyful laughter because we get the privilege of partnering with God in what He is doing to reach others with the gospel.

Edgewood has always been a church committed to missions. In 1905, over 40 charter members of Edgewood covenanted together: “*...to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expense of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.*” Among the many Go Team partners we support, we’ve been partnering consistently with George King in Japan for almost 65 years!

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3. The profit of giving. While Paul was grateful for their gifts, he was even more thankful for what their giving was doing in their own souls according to verse 17: “*Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.*” These terms were common accounting words. He doesn’t focus on what *he* receives, but

on what *they* are receiving in Heaven. Paul did not rejoice in *what* was sent, he found joy in *why* it was sent. Their giving propelled the gospel and was an investment in their own spiritual lives, both here and in Heaven. No wonder they were so joyful about being generous.

We live in a world which is all about getting but this passage teaches that real joy comes from giving, not just when it's easy, but when giving costs us something. One of the biggest obstacles to giving is the fear that when I give something away, it is now gone. Write this down: *Giving isn't about losing something; it is about gaining something you will never lose. Every gift given for the gospel is not subtracted, it is multiplied!* The fruit of their financial support was credited to their eternal account in Heaven. Plus, it led to others coming to faith in Christ.

Jesus said something similar in Matthew 6:19-21: ***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*** Our hearts always go where we put our money. In other words, our feelings follow our finances.

Randy Alcorn writes, *“You cannot take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”* Acts 20:35 records Jesus saying it ***“is more blessed to give than to receive.”*** 2 Corinthians 9:6 establishes this principle: ***“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”***

One pastor said it like this: *“God doesn't multiply what you store – He multiplies what you pour. Blessings don't flow to you; they flow through you. If you're feeling stuck, maybe it's time to stop storing and start pouring.”*

4. The praise of giving. Giving to God's work is not merely a horizontal transaction – it is ultimately an act of vertical worship as we see in verse 18: ***“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”*** Paul was ***“well supplied,”*** which literally means, *“filled to the full.”* Because they couldn't give online or write a check, they sent their offering with Epaphroditus, who delivered to it Paul.

I think of the joyful generosity of Edgewood several years ago when we gave over \$50,000 to help purchase the Mobile Medical Unit for Pregnancy Resources. Because of your over-the-top giving, we were able to pay off our 20-year building

mortgage in less than four years. Due to your hilarious generosity, over \$82,000 was given for hurricane relief in North Carolina. We also have reserve funds available to expand our children's restrooms, and to restripe our parking lot this spring to increase our ADA accessible and regular spaces. We've also received some generous memorial gifts recently. Because of our financial surplus last year and our healthy reserve fund, we've also set aside nearly \$70,000 for missions' initiatives. This has allowed us to do the following:

- Dean and Sue Zemke serve in Japan and need forty new chairs for their church. We're sending them funds to purchase them.
- Beginning in May, Grant Williams will be doing some leadership training and development at Camp Forest Springs for 11 months. This program will equip him in every aspect of camping ministry. We'll be partnering with him financially.
- I've been communicating with Arnold Belasco about how we can come alongside him and his ministry in Spain after the sudden death of his wife Leslie. We're waiting to hear back from him.
- We've been partnering with one of our young adults (name withheld) while she has been receiving some intensive training in Asia. She'll be back next month. Here's a picture of her with Pastor Kyle and Liesl who just visited her during Kyle's sabbatical.
- We've also recently partnered with Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Safe Families, and One Eighty.

Paul compares their joyful generosity to Old Testament sacrifices where animals were slain and then burned on the altar. Coupled with the ***“fragrant offering”*** of incense, the aroma of barbecued leg of lamb filled the Temple as it wafted into the noses of all who walked by. More than that, these offerings were very pleasing to God according to Leviticus 1:9: ***“And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.”***

This is reinforced in Hebrews 13:16: ***“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”*** God receives our joyful generosity much like He received offerings in the Old Testament – as sacred and holy acts of devotion which bring Him great pleasure.

When you give, you're not just giving to the church, to a missionary, or to a mission organization; you are giving to God Himself and He receives your giving as a fragrant offering and a sweet aroma. *Since everything we have belongs to*

Him, we're simply demonstrating that He is in first place in our lives by returning what is rightfully His in the first place.

The next time you give, put a smile on your face and laugh out loud, while making these five declarations.

- With this offering, I am declaring my total dependence and trust in You.
- With this offering, I am resisting everything in our culture that constantly whispers in my ear that I need more and more.
- With this offering, I am sending treasure to my account in Heaven.
- With this offering, I am affirming that my heart belongs to You.
- With this offering, I am giving so others can go, all for Your glory.

Picture this. Every time you mail in your check, set up an automatic withdrawal, give online, or place an envelope in one of our offering boxes in the lobby, God is smiling while He breathes in the sweet-smelling sacrifice and aroma of your offering.

Continuing this theme, we see how the sacrificial death of Jesus, the final sacrifice, was a pleasing offering to the Father according to Ephesians 5:2: “...***Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***” I hope you're able to come to one of our Good Friday services at either 3:30 or 5:00 where we'll focus on our Savior's substitutionary death. Just a reminder there is no childcare for these services.

Let's make it our joy to spread the fragrance of Christ to those who have not yet put their faith in Christ as we read in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16: “***But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.***” There's still time to invite at least one person to our Easter services next weekend. Please put their initials or names up on our vinyl prayer board in the south lobby. We're praying that many will move from death to life as we spread the sweet smell of our risen Savior during all four services (our full children's ministry will be available only during our Sunday services).

Because we're partakers of grace and partners in the gospel, we're to participate in giving to God's work by practicing joyful generosity.

5. The promise of giving. We come now to verse 19, which is one of the most quoted passages in the entire book: ***“And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”*** God promises to provide when we provide Him with the provisions He has entrusted to us.

- The word **“and”** links this promise to what Paul had just said. The context of this verse has to do with believers who joyfully and sacrificially give so others can go with the gospel.
- The phrase, **“my God”** shows this promise is for those who have a personal relationship with God through the new birth.
- God will **“supply every need.”** The word **“supply”** means, *“to fill to the brim, to furnish abundantly,”* and **“every need”** refers to *“all necessities of life.”* In 1890, a survey was taken in which respondents were asked to name their basic needs. They came up with 16. One hundred years later, the same question was asked, and respondents came up with 98 basic needs. God promises to meet our needs, not our greeds. I’ve always liked Hudson Taylor’s quote: *“God’s work, done in God’s way, will never lack for God’s supply.”*
- The phrase **“according to His riches”** reminds us that God’s riches are infinite and limitless. This is God’s way of saying, *“You can always come back for a second helping. There’s plenty more where that came from.”* God’s wealth never runs dry, and He has never failed His people. No request is ever denied based on “insufficient funds.”
- The phrase **“in glory”** tells us that our giving so others can go with the gospel is all for His glory. Psalm 72:19: ***“Blessed be His glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and Amen.”*** God’s glory is the source and goal of His gracious provision.
- This promise is rooted **“in Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, ***“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.”***

Malachi 3:10, contains an amazing promise associated with giving at least 10% to the Lord: ***“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”*** A similar principle is found in Proverbs 3:9-10: ***“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”***

I'm reminded of a powerful quote from Peter Marshall: *"Give according to your income, lest God make your income according to your giving."*

I see the tithe (or 10%), as a good place to start, like a yardstick to measure our giving. Because giving is something we *get* to do, it should be done joyfully, generously, regularly, proportionately, and sacrificially. Over the years, by God's grace, Beth and I have grown in joyful generosity, where giving has become one of our favorite things to do. When we prepare our taxes every year, we're eager to see how much the Lord has allowed us to give to the ministry of Edgewood, to missionaries, and to mission organizations.

According to Lifeway Research, 3 in 4 say tithing is a biblical command which still applies today. While research indicates most people give 2-3% of their income to charitable causes or religious groups, among those who give at least a tithe, 75% give more than 10%. This shows the truth that joy comes from generosity.

In verse 20, we're reminded that everything we've been given, and everything we give, is for the glory of God: ***"To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."*** This spontaneous doxology acknowledges that the giving and the going, the finances and the fruit, and the grace of the gospel, all come from God, who is both the Giver and the Gift.

6. The potential of giving. Brothers and sisters in Christ, amazing things happen when Christians give so others can go with the gospel. This reciprocal relationship is seen in verse 21: ***"Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you."*** I love how Paul wants the givers greeted by the goers. Notice how he applauds the church at Philippi for their giving and he also mentions ***"every saint."*** This shows how the entire church, and individual Christians, are involved in giving. The old English word is *"salute"* from which comes *"salutation,"* and conveys the idea of honor and respect.

Next, notice in verse 22 how their joyful generosity allowed the gospel to penetrate an unreached people group: ***"All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."*** Through Paul's influence, guards and other officials responded to the gospel, and in turn, they shared the gospel with members of Nero's own household! The gospel reached into the heart of Rome, right under the emperor's nose. In Philippians 1:12, Paul said, ***"What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."*** Their giving allowed Paul to reach the resistant unreached.

This is incredible because Nero was known as a cruel and unstable man. He had his own mother killed along with his wife Octavia. Later, he kicked his second wife to death while she was pregnant. In addition, he blamed the great fire of Rome on Christians, leading to the first large-scale persecution of believers. He burned Christians alive, coating them in pitch and setting them on fire to light his gardens at night. Other Christians were torn apart by dogs in public arenas. According to tradition, he executed both Peter and Paul.

Let's not lose heart when we look at how unreachable some people seem to be. As Jerome said, "*Paul turned the house of Christ's persecutor into a church!*" God is at work around the world, in some of the most restricted countries in the world, like Iran. According to many sources, the Iranian Church is the fastest growing in the world.

BTW, we gather to pray for unreached people groups the first Monday night of every month. This past week, we focused on Syria and Lebanon.

In order to grow in our understanding of missions, our EdgeMissions team has utilized three video screens on the north wall of our east lobby. They're featuring our Go Team partners and sharing some facts we need to learn. Here are just a few.

- Of the 17,000 people groups in the world, 7,000 are still unreached.
- 96% of the world's unreached are in the 10/40 window.
- Only 3.4% of all missionaries go to the unreached.
- For every \$100,000 that Christians make, only \$1.83 goes to reaching the unreached.

In verse 23, Philippians ends like it begins with a focus on the grace of God: "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*"

Action Steps

One high schooler, after being challenged to begin giving, made this honest statement: "*I guess giving is all about trust.*" That's what God said in Malachi 3.

- 1. Make sure you're giving out of delight, not duty.**
- 2. Start giving something every week.**
- 3. Take the tithing challenge, but don't stop there.**

4. **Give to one of our Go Team partners.** It would be good if everyone of us would consider giving to one of our Go Team partners. Edgewood members Aaron and Amanda Langworthy are now at 53% as they wait on God to provide what they need so they can go to the unreached in Uganda.
5. **Serve with one of our local Go Team partners.**

Because we're partakers of grace and partners in the gospel, let's keep participating in giving to God's work by practicing joyful generosity.

Edgewood, I am thankfully thankful with a thankful attitude of gratitude for each one of you. Thanks can't fully express how thankful I am to be one of your pastors. P.S. Thanks again.

One Eighty Interview (Jenny Halupnik is the Director of Engagement at One Eighty).

1. Describe One Eighty and its mission.
2. What do you see God doing?
3. Can you share a story of life change?
4. How can we pray for you?